

Ruth Topic (God's Providence)

1. Introduction.
 - A. What we have covered in the book of Ruth so far.
 - (1). Went through the whole narrative, chapters 1 –4.
 - (2). Now covering various topics. Last week Bret talked about divine sovereignty and human responsibility.
 - (3). Today's major topic or theme in Ruth will be providence.
 - B. What is providence and how does it apply to God?
 - (1). Not a common word found in scripture.
 - (2). How we can define providence?
 - a. Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology – providence summarizes God's ongoing relationship with his creation. He breaks it down as God preserves, controls or concurs, and governs his creation.
 - b. David Atkinson in his commentary on Ruth defines providence in that God not only created the world, but he sustains it and rules it.
 - c. We will use these definitions together as a structure to see what scripture shows of providence and how providence is specifically displayed in Ruth.
 - (3). First we want to say what providence is not:
 - a. Deism – God wound the world/universe up and left. This is convenient for those who don't want God prying around in their lives.
 - b. Pantheism – creation does not have a distinct existence in itself, but is only part of God, in the trees, the rocks. Is identifying deity with various forces and workings of nature.
 - Ruth the Moabitess – her people's god was Chemosh (Kemosh) the national war god of the Moabites when they fought Israel. He was considered also to be a male as a sun god, female as the moon goddess.
 - Pantheism was a constant problem with the Israelites during the time of the Judges. Setting of Ruth was during the time of the Judges. Israel was to break the altars of the other inhabitants of the promised land, but did not; and the other peoples' gods became a snare. God sent judges to save them out of the hands of raiders, but then the people would go back to the other gods, following, serving, and worshiping them.

- c. Providence is not events determined by fate or chance. But by God, who is personal and actively involved in creation at every moment.

- 2. Breakdown of God's Providence – combining Wayne Grudem and David Atkinson's definition.
 - A. Creation/Preservation – God keeps things existing, maintains their properties with which he created them.
 - (1). Examples.
 - a. Gravity – I don't wake up one day and see the furniture floating around the house. Ex. juggling balls.
 - b. Mice like peanut butter. Trapping mice example.
 - c. Structure of this stage. Had to put up 2-by-4s to hold the dry wall, hold up this beam. Beam holds about 30,000 pounds. Wouldn't want it to fall on my head.
 - (2). We see God's providence at the very beginning of what we consider time. Let's go to Genesis 1 and look at creation.
 - a. Gen. 1:11 - 3rd day - God has the land produce vegetation; plants bear seeds after their own kind. Trees have fruit with seed according to its own kind. Apple trees have apples, not bananas.
 - b. Verse 14 - 4th day – God creates lights in the sky to serve as signs to mark seasons, and days and years.
 - c. Verse 20 – 5th day, water has creatures after their own kind, birds according to their own kind.
 - d. Verse 24 – 6th day - the living creatures on land according to their kinds.
 - e. All through creation there is consistency. An apple is an apple, is an apple. Apple seeds grow apple trees, not figs. Apple trees blossom/bear fruit in seasons.
 - (3). God's providence in making things exist a certain way and giving things specific properties is the basis of our science.
 - a. Man does not create things. Man (and women) discover the properties by which things were created. We discover the means of combustion to make engines for our cars. We discover laws of aerodynamics to make airplanes fly.
 - b. It gives a basis for our work. Earlier we talked about this stage. Things are built knowing how to use the properties of God's creation. Greg has a company that builds houses applying principles. Specific woods are used based on their physical composition. Don't build a roof with notebook paper. Farmers find the best means to grow and harvest crops.
 - c. God's providence determines how we are born and live. For quite a number of years it has been proven

that it takes a man and a woman to produce a child. And so far, it takes a woman to bear the child. They have been unable to legislate this any other way.

- (4). What do scriptures say about God's as creator?
- a. **Col. 1:16-17 – Speaking of Christ – For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.**
 - God has made the distinctness in all things, things we can see, things we can't see.
 - b. **Acts 17:24-25, 28 – The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. Verse 28 - For in him we live, and move, and have our being....**
 - God's providence is shown in creating us. We live and move and have our being in him.
 - c. Bulletin Verse - **Neh 9:6 You are the LORD, you alone; you have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you.**
 - God preserves the distinctness of his created objects. It pokes a hole in man's ideas of evolution. (Some slime doesn't change its properties to become a penguin, a bear, or a car salesman.)
 - This is the result of God's creation – for his glory, his worship.
- (5). Now how about the book of Ruth?
- a. Ruth 1 – God's relationship with people through food.
 - Who created food? God did. In Ruth we see God comes to his people by providing food. God has created the barley and the wheat.
 - We see in God's creation a season for growing wheat and barley. We read earlier in Genesis about lights in the sky to show seasons. Outside we see the beginning of autumn or fall. How many farmers are planting corn now?

- b. God's providence through our work. Ruth and Naomi couldn't just sit in their house and have barley drop through the ceiling at mealtime. Ruth went to glean the fields of grain where God had caused barley to grow. Later Boaz is working at the threshing floor to separate the grain from the chaff. God creates us with different skills to do different types of work.
- c. Having children – God enables Boaz and Ruth to have a child. God's providence in his created order is that Ruth bears the child, not Boaz.
- d. God is worshiped. Shown in the various blessings throughout the book. Naomi blesses Orpah and Ruth. Boaz blesses his workers; his workers bless him. Boaz blesses Ruth; Naomi blesses Boaz. Boaz again blesses Ruth. The townspeople bless Boaz and Ruth; the women bless Naomi because of the child. It is recognition of God being the creator/preserver of all of life. All created things are for his glory.

B. Second part of God's providence, after God creates things – Atkinson says God sustains his creation, Grudem calls it control or concurrence – God continues to ensure things work the way he created them to work. He directs their distinctive properties.

(1). Scriptures.

- a. First of all, God makes his creation do what he wants it to do.
 - **Eph. 1:11 - In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.** God's will and purpose are central to how his creation works. He uses those properties of the world to work his purpose.
 - **Psalm 135:6 – The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths.** Is God arbitrary? No, God sustains things to work the same way, over and over again.
- b. Examples.
 - Inanimate creation – **Psalm 148:7-8 Praise the LORD from the earth...lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding.**
 - Continued – **Psalm 135:7 He makes clouds rise from the end of the earth; he sends lightning with the rain and brings out the**

wind from his storehouses. See how God uses rain, snow, winds, lightning.

- **Animals – Matt. 6:26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.** God does this every day.
- Job chapters 38-41 God questions Job on how things are done in the world. Were you there when I laid the earth's foundation? Do you know where light and darkness live? Can you bring the constellations in their seasons?
- End result, Job is speechless, and says, I despise myself, I repent in dust and ashes.
- Our fragile existence, our every breath is dependent on God.

c. How does God sustain his creation? One way is through his word.

- **Psalm 33:6 - By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.** This is creation.
- **Heb. 1:3 – The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.** This is God maintaining and controlling what he has created.
- **Deut 8:3 He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.** So it appears that God's word has influence in all parts of our lives. He created the world and then gave an owner's manual on how it works.

(2). Some examples of God sustaining us in our lives.

- a. **Prov. 16:9 – In his heart a man plans his course but the LORD determines his steps.** We might think that man is in control of everything. But God is behind the scenes. Ex. Pharaoh used by God.
- b. **Psalm 75:6-7 – No one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt a man. But it is God who judges: he brings one down; he exalts another.** We work hard to get ahead in life, but we are not doing this separate from God.
- c. **Psalm 139:13 For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb...**

Verse 16 All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. God is responsible for us before we were born.. He didn't just create Adam and Eve and say see you later, go have kids and maybe I'll stop by someday to see how they turned out.

- d. **Luke 12:13-21** – Jesus' parable about a rich man, lots of crops (God's providence), tear down barns; build bigger ones; store all my stuff. I will then eat, drink and be merry. God says, "You fool!" This very night, your life will be demanded from you. So God is involved when we die. From birth to death, God sustains life.
 - e. Does any event since creation happen outside of God's control?
 - f. What about evil? Bret taught last week about God's sovereignty, is God sovereign over evil? So God shows providence in things that are considered evil. That's why John read Amos 4:6-13.
 - God gave his people empty stomachs in every city, lack of bread in every town. Why? To have his people return to him, from following other gods. God withheld rain, struck their crops with locusts and mildew. He sent plagues.
 - Why – so they would return to him. But how did the passage end: **verse 13 He who forms the mountains, creates the wind, and reveals his thoughts to man, he who turns dawn to darkness, and treads the high places of the earth – The LORD God Almighty is his name.** God is not evil, but he uses or controls the things that are considered evil for his purposes. The end of it all is to bring glory to his name.
 - **Acts 4:27-28 – Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.** This is God controlling evil for his purpose, even with his son Jesus, to bring God glory and to provide salvation for all.
- (3). Let's look at God's control and sustaining in Ruth.

- a. Famine – why – we don't know. We do know it was in the period of the Judges where at times God was dealing with his people to bring them back to himself. Later we see God provides food to his people. God still controls life through the seasons that are used to plant and reap barley and wheat.
 - b. The deaths of Elimelech and his two sons. Here we might look at this as evil. Naomi considered her name should be bitter, Mara, because the LORD had afflicted her and brought misfortune on her. But we already saw that God sustains his creation through birth and death. God's purpose was not complete in Naomi and Ruth while they lived in Moab.
 - c. God gives instructions thru his law to establish a means for the poor to glean from the fields. Ruth can glean in Boaz's field because God gave instructions about watching out for the poor, the widows, and the orphans. We will visit this again in a couple of weeks.
 - d. God also by his word has given the law for the kinsman-redeemer to redeem land for family members that are poor. The whole interaction between Ruth and Boaz is about continuing a family lineage, which so happens to be King David's.
- C. Finally, we want to look at God's providence from his governing and ruling over his creation to fulfill his purposes.
- (1). Review.
 - a. Deism – God winds things up and leaves. God would not care how things turn out with his creation. Sort of like how they're interpreting the separation of church and state now in our country.
 - b. Pantheism – there is an array of gods that fight each other to have control. Governing and ruling is by the strongest god. See lots of examples in the OT.
 - c. God of providence - he is in relationship with his creation to rule and govern for his purpose and glory.
 - (2). Scripture.
 - a. **Psalm 103:19 - The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.** This is a general statement about God's ruling.
 - b. **Psalm 22:28 – for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations.** Here is a more specific statement where it impacts us. It does not say in the future or after everyone has become a Christian. God rules over all.

- c. God could rule and govern the earth without our participation. But he has chosen man to participate with him in that rulership and governing.
 - **Gen. 1:28** after God created male and female, it says: **God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”**
 - As Christians – **Eph. 2:10** **For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.**
- (3). God’s governing and ruling in Ruth for his purpose.
- a. Who – this book is about a group of people from the tribe of Judah. God had established a covenant with them through Abraham. He brought them to a land of inheritance after showing his rulership to Pharaoh of Egypt and his domination over other nations that would try to stop Israel.
 - b. Backdrop – in the days when the judges ruled. Bret has already stated that everyone did as he saw fit; Israel had no king. God had used leaders like Moses and Joshua to lead his people. Then he raised up judges to lead the Israelites in their relationship with him. Yet despite their stubbornness, God continued to manipulate events for his purpose.
 - c. God uses a Moabitess to provide for Naomi. Ruth is from a nation hostile to God, but Ruth chooses Naomi’s God to be her God.
 - d. God directs events to bring about the meeting of Ruth and Boaz.
 - Ruth and Naomi arrive at Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.
 - Ruth goes to glean in a field that just happens to belong to Boaz.
 - Just then, Boaz arrives from Bethlehem to his field.
 - Boaz happens to be a kinsman-redeemer for Naomi and Ruth.
 - God enables Ruth to bear a child, a son, who will be the grandfather of the future king David.
 - The lineage of David leads to Jesus Christ.
 - e. Though God governs and rules for his purpose, Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz are active participants.

3. Application.
 - A. See God is active in every part of our life. We do not live as deists, pantheists, even as atheists, not trusting in God in every area of our lives.
 - B. See God's providence in creation. There are principles and laws to be found in creation. If we see them in the physical, it will help us to understand them in the spiritual.
 - C. See God's providence in his control of all things. Hurricane Katrina did not happen without God's foreknowledge. We don't live in fear.
 - D. See God's providence in his purpose and plans, for the nations and for us as individuals. Desire to be active and understanding participants as God rules over all creation till Jesus comes again.

4. Closing – read **Psalm 23** – a Psalm of God's providence in our lives.

¹The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

²He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,

³he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.